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Modern Elements in Luther's Educational Writings.

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In almost every educational convention in this country Reform is the key word. The ultimate object of the proposed reforms is to train the children, the men and women of tomorrow, to be able to think rightly and render useful service for humanity, for the state, for the family, and for their own welfare. In short, the Ordinance of 1787 is being interpreted in the light of the spirit of our new world nationality. However, we see a broader conception of religion, a wiser and more natural attitude toward morality, and a more scientific practical view of knowledge.

We should learn from the experience of closely related nations. Germany, commercially, socially, in the broad meaning of the word, and educationally, is our nearest neighbor. We therefore must realize the creative influence of the German schools upon our educational systems, and carefully observe the newer educational reforms of the Modern German Empire. These reforms are of great importance to us in this decade of reorganization.

The object of this paper is to restate Luther's conception of education in the light of modern reform movements. No claim to originality is made. A careful perusal of the English articles on Luther and of the histories of education used in our colleges will show how much his ideas are misunder-

stood through the lack of a close rereading of his educational writings and the practice of quoting disconnected paragraphs.

In Luther's famous pamphlet, "To the City Councillors," may be found the spirit of the Ordinance of 1787. "Sonder das ist einer Stadt bestes und allerreichstes Gedeihen, Heil und Kraft, dass sie viel feiner, gelehrter, vernünftiger, ehrebarer, wohlerzogener Bürger hat."

Luther was one of the first to recognize practically the theories on which our American school systems have been founded; namely, that the school system should be one organic whole from the grades through the universities; that the moral, intellectual, and physical welfare of the youth should be cultivated; and that the schools do not exist for the schools' sake, but for the sake of the state. The state should further and encourage all means of education in order to have properly equipped men to govern, and suitably educated women to train children.

Luther held that the state, not the church, should control the schools. This is *the* vital question of educational reform. Luther's educational ideas were based on his conception of freedom, that was the freedom of a Christian man—in reality of a German Christian man. We need only to substitute moral for Christian and the modern elements in Luther's educational ideas are very evident. Luther would change only one word in Rein's statement—"Wer an die Zukunft des Volkes denkt, muss vor allem bei der Erziehung der Jugend ansetzen und hier dafür sorgen, dass die schlummernden Kräfte, die *eine gültige Natur* mitgab, geweckt und gestählt, und auf hohe Ziele hergerichtet werden."

Luther considered it a fatal mistake to provide schools merely for the ecclesiastical class, as if this class were *the* chosen class of God. He held that the secular classes were also divinely inspired; that all classes were but different members of one organic whole. It is only necessary to extend this statement to include the farming and industrial classes of our times and his ideas are fairly modern. He treated his subject, as you will recall, from the viewpoint of practical necessity. He observed the needs of his country at a period of social unrest, caused by the newer commercial activity. From the vitalizing interpretation of the Humanists he had profited and also from the recent studies in the languages. He desired and hoped that the state might be benefited by the best of the revival of learning and he believed that youth was capable of receiving and appreciating live instruction.

His principles of educational reform are vital today, for they are conclusions derived not from mere theory or from speculation, but from keen, commonsense observation. The great productive linguist, the strong interpretive teacher, had heard the cry of youth for life and light. That cry had been his own in early experience. He was an advocate of the rights of youth, a true forerunner of the "century of childhood." He was not a

psychologist, in the modern meaning of that term, but he was an ardent lover and a knowing friend of children, emulating the principles of his Master, the Man of Galilee.

I can mention only a few of the specific reforms urged by Luther.

Above all he emphasized the importance of the position of the teacher. The teacher should feel himself free, thought Luther, to conduct classes according to an earnest conviction which he had acquired from wide experience and thorough observation. The teacher should be thoroughly equipped in order that he might give vital instruction. He must be a real master of his subject. (Luther was speaking particularly of languages, but the same thing holds true of any other subject.) He held it to be an undertaking of folly, at that late date (1524), to attempt to learn the writings of the originals by reading the interpretations of the fathers or their commentaries. Recent discoveries and advance in linguistic studies had thrown new light on the writings, and teachers should profit by these results. Furthermore, he stated that the teacher, unless properly equipped, is too often inclined to read into the text his own thoughts. Unless there were thorough preparation and exactness the truth might be obscured, and the spirit of the writings eventually lost. What Luther feared happened.

(For example, let us take the Psalm so often quoted by the higher critics. Luther deemed it a great mistake to try to establish the doctrine of the divinity of Christ by a mistranslation of the 109th Psalm, for the Hebrew contains no word about divinity. He held it to be a fatal error for Christians to attempt to prove their teachings by means which must invoke disdain and derision on the part of the opponents who know the languages. That sounds like the voice of today, yet the 1892 authorized version of Luther's translation contains this heading for the Psalm in question: "Christ the Eternal King and High Priest.")

Inasmuch as our teachers' conventions are generally thrilled by eloquent phrases about the spirit or personality of the teacher, Luther's statement is of interest. He said: It was not my spirit, but my knowledge of languages that made me certain and sure. Knowledge then is the most valuable asset of the teacher. With knowledge comes understanding, then a greater personality.

Luther held that teachers should be no merely scholars and instructors, but advisors of the youth. His attitude on this point is especially of interest at this time when the advisory system, already introduced at several universities, is receiving the careful attention of leading educators. I might quote from the report of the late Dean John O. Reed and still quote Luther. "The teacher should counsel and aid students in moral and religious difficulties; should promote a normal social life; should assist pupils in the choice of a career; and should raise their working standards. Furthermore, that students should have the benefit of sympathetic personal

contact with their teachers. The maintenance of such relations is an essential feature of the teacher's true function."

Luther held a high opinion of the capacity of the normal child. He had observed, in his association with children, that they had a natural craving for, and an ability to learn languages provided the study was presented in a reasonable and direct manner, adapted to their ability and preparation. The teacher, he thought, should always keep in mind the pupil's desire to work and learn, he should always go slow and never overcrowd. Above all he should be human. He attacked the formalism of the schools and some of his statements sound as if they might be taken from a very modern educational novel. He wished to eliminate the "hell and purgatory" of the schools, the martyring of pupils to grammar drill, *Casualibus et Temporalibus*. He insisted that, inasmuch as they were living in a new age, teachers must change their methods of instruction and adapt them according to the needs and qualifications of the pupils. Furthermore, he believed even that the children of the trades class, both boys and girls, should receive the benefit of learning in order to make them better mechanics and more useful members of society.

In order to make feasible the proposed reforms, Luther advocated a thorough reformation of all schools, and especially a reconstruction of the course of studies, and the introduction of vital methods of teaching, which would save time, encourage independent thinking and thoroughly equip the young for future study or for useful service.

In short, his demands were not unlike the demands of the modern reformers, * if we take the time in which he lived into consideration, and remember his attitude toward the sciences and philosophy which he thought were antagonistic to his conception of Christianity.

Less committing to memory, more observation—more facts retained.

Less form, more art—a better form.

Fewer books, a thorough understanding of the content—a wiser interpretation.

Fewer languages—a more complete mastery of the languages studied.

Less learning—more creative power, a greater knowledge.

More light; more life; more individuality; more nationality—Luther added—more Christianity. *

* See "Die Wichtigkeit der neuen deutschen Erziehung für Amerika." *Monatshefte* XI. 8. W. W. Florer.

* Paper read before the Western Division of the Modern Language Association, St. Louis, Mo., 1910.